

National Security Language Initiative: Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the National Security Language Initiative?

The National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) is a bold attempt by the President to secure America's standing in the world as well as our ability to compete in the world of ideas and the world of commerce. Four governmental agencies will contribute to the Initiative. They are the Department of Education, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The Initiative has two broad parts. One is to extend the number of Americans who are mastering critical need languages and to assure that they are starting them at a younger age. One of the Initiative pilot programs starts students on the path to language mastery in kindergarten and allows them to continue that path of study through college. The second is to develop teachers in these foreign languages. Even in the schools where there is the motivation and resources to teach these critical languages, we are short of teachers who are highly qualified. The lack of teachers is a considerable barrier to developing strategic language programs and must be addressed.

What are the languages supported in the National Security Language Initiative?

In year one, the Initiative is supporting Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, the Indic family including Hindi, the Iranian family including Farsi, and the Turkic family including Turkish.

Why aren't other languages such as Swahili and Spanish included in the National Security Language Initiative?

After a thorough study of the economic and security needs of the country, the Initiative partners decided to concentrate on these five languages and three language families for the first year of NSLI. We acknowledge that there are other important languages and the list may change in subsequent years but for now these are the languages that the Initiative is focusing on.

What is the connection between foreign language and national security?

An essential component of U.S. national security in the post-9/11 world is the ability to engage foreign governments and peoples. This is especially true in critical regions where we need to encourage reform, promote understanding, convey respect for other cultures, and provide an opportunity to learn more about our country and its citizens. To do this, we must be able to communicate in other languages, a challenge for which we are unprepared. Deficits in foreign language learning and teaching negatively affect our national security, diplomacy, law enforcement, intelligence communities and cultural understanding. It prevents us from effective communication in foreign media environments, hurts counter terrorism efforts, and hampers our capacity to work with people and

governments in post-conflict zones. Also, our business competitiveness is hampered in making effective contracts and adding new markets overseas.

Will the National Security Language Initiative replace more commonly taught languages like Spanish and French with those languages deemed “critical”?

It is not the purpose of the National Security Language Initiative to replace languages already being taught in schools. Languages like Spanish have long received the bulk of the funding and attention of the foreign language studies community. NSLI is simply an attempt to shift the focus to include languages that are becoming more important in today's world.

Will the National Security Language Initiative include cultural studies along with language instruction?

We agree that cultural context is important in mastering a foreign language and the federal government funds several programs meant to increase cultural understanding such as the Fulbright/Hayes Fellowship. However, the National Security Language Initiative will be focused on language skills because that is the area most in need of aid.

How much money has the President requested from Congress to fund this initiative and how will the money be split up among the four partners?

The President has committed \$114 million dollars in his fiscal year 2007 budget and we are working diligently to get that money through congress. Of that money, \$57 million will go to the Department of Education, \$26.7 million will go to the State Department, \$25 million will go to the Department of Defense, and \$5 million will go to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Will teaching students foreign languages take time or resources away from learning how to read?

Teaching foreign language will not take the place of the goals of No Child Left Behind. Instead, it will contribute to those goals by increasing America's global competitiveness and expanding students' horizons.

What kind of employment can I get using a critical language?

Many government agencies have a high demand for employees with these important languages skills. They are called critical for that very reason. But it is not only the public sector that needs these language speakers, the private sector also looks for employees with language skills. As more and more multinational companies expand around the globe they need people who can speak the local language and understand the culture.